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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000903

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [YM](#) [KMCC](#) [DOMESTIC POLITICS](#)
SUBJECT: SOSWA MEETS DCM ON THE 2004 HRR

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Amidst heavy ROYG criticism of the 2004 U.S. Human Rights Report, Human Rights Minister Amat al-Alim al-Soswa delivered a 49-page ROYG response to the report to DCM April Soswa took the opportunity to express her own less critical feelings on the report, and share her Ministry's strategy for improving human rights in Yemen in 2005. End Summary.

Soswa: "We Don't Have the Whitest Page"

12. (C) Minister Soswa delivered a 49-page section-by-section response to the 2004 HR Country Report on Yemen to DCM April 12. She claimed that several sections of the report were flawed due to vague assertions and failure to cite specific cases. She also stated her "disappointment" with what she characterized as a lack of coordination between Post and the MHR upon the HRR's release, and expressed her willingness to be more "positively engaged" during next year's drafting period. (Note: Post worked with HHR officials while drafting the Yemen report and delivered a copy to the Ministry. End Note). DCM promised better coordination and suggested that the MHR and Post co-sponsor a 2005 roundtable to jointly debate the issue in front of the public. Soswa agreed it was a good idea.

13. (C) Soswa confided that she personally was pleased overall with the report. She told DCM that in her address to the ROYG committee tasked with preparing the rebuttal she said, "We do not have the whitest page in human rights," and referred to the U.S. report as the "best review" of Yemen's human rights thus far available. She added that she advised the committee that the purpose of the report is not to embarrass Yemen and should be used instead as a tool for improving human rights practices.

Soswa: "Human Rights are Unfortunately Political"

14. (C) Soswa denied recent press rumors that the MHR might split from the government to become an NGO. Instead, she revealed, she is pushing for the establishment of a national body on human rights issues. Soswa said she believed that forming such a body would institutionalize the way in which the ROYG deals with human rights abuses, and improve the current practice of resolving human rights abuses on a case-by-case basis and at the whim of individual ministers. Soswa said she would lobby parliamentarians and the Cabinet for support. Both presently reject the idea, she said, "discussion of human rights unfortunately quickly became very political."

15. (C) Soswa reported that the MHR would release its own human rights report this month. "We will take your report and enhance it," she promised. According to Soswa the ROYG report will deal with broad themes and examine both governmental and societal abuses. She described her Ministry's role as a "facilitator" with NGOs being the primary authors of the report.

16. (C) Soswa pledged her commitment to, "continue to improve the status of human rights in Yemen," and that her office would stress awareness among security officers, push for a women's quota system in Parliament and local councils, and better address trafficking in children and women.

Comment:

17. (C) Soswa dutifully delivered the long ROYG rebuttal, but then moved quickly to examine next steps to improve human rights conditions in Yemen. Although she criticized sections of the report, her personal opinion of its usefulness clearly differs from the official ROYG position. Although striving to institutionalize the work of her ministry, as well as aid the development of NGOs as human rights shareholders, Soswa clearly faces an uphill struggle against her politically more influential colleagues in the Cabinet.

18. (C) Since the release of the HRR, Post has witnessed the gamut of responses from civil society, the press and the

ROYG. Although most reviews have been positive and critiques constructive, the ROYG's response has been contradictory and defensive. At first glance, the official rebuttal seems to primarily rebut the HRR with vague challenges and/or declarations of law. A closer examination will hopefully expose more salient points that Post can use. In the end, despite the ROYG's irritation, it is encouraging to see human rights being discussed and debated so openly in Yemen. End Comment.
Krajeski